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Class mediations, working-class lives and labour subjectivity in post-socialist Ukraine

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Abstract

This article contributes a post-socialist working-class lives perspective to the literature on class (dis)identification. Based on an ethnographic study of middle-age workers in the western Ukrainian city of Lviv, the article problematises the apparent absence of workers' class identification despite significant commodification and marketisation of society. Evidence presented here points to the potency of gendered, national, regional and post-colonial constitutions of the subjectivity of labour. Rather than being fragmented identities competing with notions of 'class', these constitutions represent a 'site of conjunction' of the changing global processes and local social forms mediating class. The article illustrates empirically and analytically the specific social forms that shape labour subjectivity in Ukraine, while theoretically locating subjectivities as arising from the intersection of various determinations, where social forms and material relations are internally related with and through each other, representing a complex unity of the diverse.

Keywords

Class, mediation, subjectivity, social forms, labour, Ukraine, post-socialist Europe

Introduction

‘Class, as it eventuated within nineteenth-century industrial capitalist societies, and as it then left its imprint upon the heuristic category of class, has in fact no claim to universality. Class in that sense is no more than a special case of the historical formations which arise out of class struggle’ (Thompson, 1978, p. 150).

Anglophone sociology has seen a resurgence of research on class, driven by the consequences of escalating inequalities and austerity politics (Savage, 2015; Savage et al., 2013). Yet, despite changes in employment, occupations and divisions of labour brought by changes in global production (Coe & Jordhus-Lier, 2010; Cumbers, Nativel, & Routledge, 2008; Henderson, Dicken, Hess, Coe, & Yeung, 2011), research on the relationship between working-class lives and the local social constitutions of workers' subjectivities has been rarer (Campling, Miyamura, Pattenden, & Selwyn, 2016; Friedman, 2015; Kalb & Halmai, 2011). In post-socialist Eastern Europe, these global processes have displaced Soviet identities (Fitzpatrick, 2005; Kotkin, 2000), decoupling working-class experiences from class identifications (Ryabchuk, 2015; Walker, 2015, 2018), reshaping communities and households (Stenning, 2005), gender relations (Ashwin, 2006), labour mobilities (Andrijasevic & Sacchetto, 2016; Likic-Brboric, 2011; Woolfson, 2007), and collective agencies (Ashwin & Clarke, 2002; Crowley & Ost, 2001; Hardy, Kozek, & Stenning, 2008).

This article contributes to an understanding of the social determinations of class as forms of mediation that produce labour subjectivities. Using an ethnographic study of middle-age workers in the western Ukrainian city of Lviv, I show how labour subjectivities emerge through social forms in and through which human relations exist within capitalism. The article has three related aims. First, to identify and analyse those social forms through which subjectivities subsist. Second, to elaborate analytically the problem of mediation and internal relations in order to grasp the polymorphism of human subjectivity constituting the social whole. Third, to contribute to an understanding of transformations of labour subjectivities as local expressions of 'critical junctions' of global capitalism and class relations (Kalb & Tak, 2005).

The paper is organised as follows: the next section reviews the scholarship on class (dis)identification in contemporary capitalism. This is followed by the discussion of field and methods. The three sections that follow explore the relationship between working lives

problems identified by interview participants – wages, careers and management authority – emplaced within the gendered social forms of spirituality, nationhood and post-colonial traumas, which emerged as axial. It concludes with a discussion of the significance of the 'mediational' approach for the study of the nexus of working-class lives and workers' subjectivities that arises from the intersection of the unity of the diverse, internally related determinations.

Class, identity and subjectivity in late capitalist society

Ideas of the 'death of class' (Pakulski & Waters, 1996) during late or 'liquid' modernity (Bauman, 2000), characterised by individualisation and identity fragmentation (Bauman, 2001; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), have recently been challenged by scholarship directly invoking class. Based on the notion of class as 'an effect – not a set of relationships or a structure' (Savage, Warde, & Devine, 2005, p. 42), a new model of class inequality (Savage et al., 2013; Savage et al., 2015) has posited that processes of differentiated 'accumulation of capitals' create class hierarchies that result in divergent experiences and outcomes (Bathmaker et al., 2016; Burnett & Veenstra, 2017; Friedman, O'Brien & Laurison, 2016; O'Brien et al, 2016). Despite its novelty, however, this model inadvertently reproduces one intractable problem of stratificationism (Goldthorpe, Lockwood, & Bechhofer, 1969) – the 'gradational mapping of status' (Bradley, 2014) that overlooks the social character of property relations dividing society along its mode of surplus appropriation (Toscano & Woodcock, 2015). In doing so, it comes close to placing class identities into static classifications where identity is mechanically ascribed to a respective gradient point, disregarding the power that categorisation carries as a system of values (Skeggs, 2015; Tyler, 2015).

Updating E. P. Thompson's idea that 'class is a relationship, and not a thing' (1963, p. 11), other scholars have shown classes to be 'made' by a movement between the abstract social forces and the concrete experience of living, often in different ways, classed lives shaped by those forces. Looking at how education (Willis, 1977), gender and care (Skeggs, 1997), race and ethnicities (Gilroy, 1993; Solomos & Back, 1995), mothering (Lawler, 2000; Reay, 1998) and femininity (Walkerdine, 1998) inflect class relations, scholars have posited it as 'a major feature of subjectivity, a historical specificity and part of a struggle over access to resources

and ways of being ... even if we ...choose not to recognize it, or to avoid it through disidentifications and dissimulations' (Skeggs, 1997, p. 7). Such critiques of classification have shown how class identities rest on a system of categorisation of human value, which is always a moral classification by those with power and authority. They facilitate an appreciation of how, despite the decline in traditional working-class identities within a changed European capitalism, new and revised classifications parallel new inequalities generated by new employment insecurities and poverty, commodification of social services, financialisation of housing and ephemerality of communities (Back, 2015; McKenzie, 2015; Paton, 2016; Tyler, 2015). As contemporary inequalities provoke new forms of struggle, they do not extinguish the analogies with struggles against the tyranny of the clock and managerial despotism of yore, aiming as the latter did to reclaim 'values beyond market value' (Skeggs, 2014; Skeggs & Loveday, 2012).

The social forms through which labour and class subsist, therefore, play a crucial role. On the one hand, class in capitalism is a social relation constituted through the conversion of human practical activity into its alienated forms – abstract labour and value (Marx, 1993; Rubin, 1978). Through a process of 'real abstraction', the direct producers and appropriators of surplus labour become subject to class division that presupposes the reproduction of capitalist social relation (Reichelt, 2005; Sohn-Rethel, 1978). Capital is constituted by the material separation of subject and object in the process of production. 'The commodity which we produce stands over against us as something external, as an object which denies all relation with the work of the subject who produced it. ... This separation between subject and object, doing and done... the subordination of subject to object, dominates every aspect of social existence and ...is fundamental to the way that subjects relate to each other under capitalism' (Holloway, 2005, p. 174).

On the other hand, as a socially constituted relation, capital presupposes the mediation of labour and class through social forms. While 'class happens when some men [sic], as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men [sic] whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs' (Thompson, 1963, p. 9), labour subjectivity is mediated through racial, ethnic, gender and other identities. Being overdetermined, varied subjectivities of labour represent neither a misrecognition of a 'true' class identity nor the epiphenomena of class, but the fact that society is a 'rich totality of many determinations and

relations... a unity of the diverse' (Jay, 1986; Marx, 1993, pp. 100-101). Thus, social forms like family, gender, property and authority, being highly interdependent, shaping each other and showing elective affinities, mediate between the concrete and abstract social processes and between global capitalism and its local expressions.

As a spatially and temporally constituted reality, global capitalism is based on 'synchronized nonsimultaneity and spatial unevenness' (Kalb, 2000, p. 37), becoming nested in societies whose prior properties co-determine both the nature of local life and the functions the localised variant of capitalism performs within the global division of labour (Wolf, 1982). Local-level transformations cannot, therefore, be deduced from an abstract 'logic of capital', but draw on 'path-dependent and interlinked local histories, fully embedded in time and space', making global capitalism 'a social process that continuously creates and recreates concrete, specific, and friction-prone linkages between particular places, and shapes idiosyncratic and contradictory ties between disparate human groups' (Kalb, 2000, p. 37).

This article extends the above intellectual framework by addressing a number of specific concerns regarding class in a post-socialist context. It asks: How may class be lived, what 'value forms' does classification take, and how are perceptions of injustice and injury associated with classification contested in such contexts?; what is the relationship between working-class lives and the relative productivity of the 'working class' identity where global transformations of production create new labouring subjects? While industrial restructuring in western Europe has been significant in reshaping working class lives, identities and public attitudes, the changes in the former Soviet bloc have arguably been more profound, the traumas from old regimes deeper, and associations with authoritarian cultural apparatuses more powerful. This calls for a deepening of scholarship on class in post-socialist Eastern Europe (Kideckel, 2008; Morris, 2016; Stenning, Smith, Rochovská, & Świątek, 2010; Walker, 2015, 2018).

Field and methods

The above conceptual framework is fleshed out through a case study conducted in 2016-2017 in Lviv, the largest city in western Ukraine, as part of a project on labour, migration and social

reproduction in the context of Ukraine's EU integration. Since 2016 Lviv has become one of Ukraine's main foreign direct investment (FDI) destinations in the automotive, electrical engineering and IT sectors, in tourism, retail and transportation, in construction and infrastructure, and in agriculture and food processing. Yet, reforms have not been as transformative as expected, and the increases in real wages have not kept up with neighbouring Poland and Czechia, or the higher wages in the care sectors of Italy, Spain and Portugal, causing significant labour migration (Górny & Kindler, 2016).

Contemporary Lviv is a centre of culture, education and tourism, and one Europe's up-and-coming IT hubs. Soviet Lvov (1944-1991) became an industrial hub, seeing the rapid construction of factories in industrial machinery and farm equipment, automotive and military vehicles, infrastructure and electricity generation, and electronics and consumer goods manufacture. Polish Lwów (1921-1939), despite being the third most populous and second most important city for higher education and culture after Warsaw, had little industry and its petty trade economy was blighted by chronic unemployment and itinerant day labour. While the city escaping physical destruction, its people suffered from Nazism and Stalinism—nearly all its pre-war Jewish (30%) population perished in the Holocaust and its Polish (50%) inhabitants had been 'transferred' to socialist Poland, while much of its smaller pre-war Ukrainian (16%) intelligentsia sent to Gulags or escaped to the West (Amar, 2015; Mick, 2016).

After WWII, Lviv saw an influx of internally displaced Ukrainian urban and rural workers (Siegelbaum, 2017), and the transfer of other Soviet workers, often sent by the authorities together with their factories, from as far-away as Saratov, Kaluga and Voronezh. The city's Galician cultural identity had been forcefully recast into a Soviet mould by the combined forces of the administrative-command economy and Stalinist nationalities policies, whose principle of 'national in form, socialist in content' (Magocsi, 1996) consigned Ukrainians as simultaneously a 'folk' and a 'productive force' within a colonial-administrative 'empire of nations' (Hirsch, 2005). The goal of rapid urbanisation and industrialisation was to create workplaces as bases of social integration that replaced extended families and civic institutions, catered for the workers' housing, cultural and sporting needs, and helped to embed a Soviet, 'internationalist' and proletarian identity. The reliance on factories was important in simultaneously improving the material conditions and erasing the established social and national identities and loyalties, and their replacement with the collective identity of 'the people of labour' (Åberg, 2000). Pandering to the idea of 'reunification with Greater

Ukraine' the authorities suppressed an identity formed in Galicia over centuries around the Graeco-Catholic Church, liquidating Ukrainian civic and cultural institutions that defined the national character of a future independent state, and killing, blackmailing or persecuting those associated with these (Amar, 2015). As will become evident, the consequences of this complex process today, particularly in the context of the ongoing war with Russia, form a key plank of local subjectivities.

By the 1970s L'viv went through a 'second wave' of industrialisation, becoming a conventional, multi-storey dominated Soviet conurbation, doubling its pre-war population and making it ethnically predominantly Ukrainian. The expansion of its industrial base widened the Soviet labour regime based on 'alienated collectivism' (Ashwin, 1999), which was marked by mutual antagonisms, distrust, atomisation and powerlessness among workers that rendered the system's declared proletarian internationalism and class solidarity unachievable. Paradoxically, the inflexibility of this working-class identity was highly dependent on the robustness of the system as a whole; the attack on this schema by its protagonists rising to challenge class paternalism, as experiences of dock workers in Poland (Ost, 2006) and miners in the Ukrainian Donbas (Mandel, 1991) showed, could provoke the system's disintegration.

This research uses the extended case methodology (Burawoy, 1998), allowing to investigate the connection between the local and singular phenomena in historical context with wider material, social and symbolic processes, institutional developments and abstractions. The approach responds to the limitations of introspective and hermeneutic analyses of cases, and to the insensitivity to power, conflict and reflexivity found in traditional ethnography, by 1) extending the observer into the world of the participant, 2) extending observations over time and space, 3) extending out from micro processes to macro forces, and 4) extending theory to accommodate visible lacunae as a means of improving theory (Burawoy, 1998, pp. 15-19). In line with this, a combination of data was used. Biographical narrative interviews were used to approach people in their everyday life to gain insights into personal experiences and trajectories as these get shaped by socioeconomic and political processes (Svasek & Domecka, 2013). Two main principles guided the participant selection: that workers are over 40 years of age and had worked at Soviet enterprises, ensuring that their careers stretched through the post-Soviet period of change in work and employment. Twelve workers, seven men and five women, were interviewed, with individual interviews

lasting 1½ to 2 hours, and two additional 2-hour interviews conducted in groups of men and women. While the number of interviewees is not high, prominence was given to the depth and detail of the interview data. My fluency in the Ukrainian language and intimate knowledge of the local context allowed for a detailed ethnographic experience. Initial contacts were made via personal networks acting as fixers, while the remainder through snowballing. The participants were told the general theme of my research – inquiry into the participants' experiences in work and employment over the last two decades. They were free to build a story around specific questions arranged around three themes: wages – their value and adequacy; employment – opportunities, careers and social mobility; and management – relationships with and authority of managers. These themes were chosen to centre on workers' employment orientations, agency and identity. I have also consulted a range of published and archival resources, including materials at the Centre for Urban History of Central Europe in Lviv, in order to identify the socio-cultural context of the city and what makes its people distinct in the country and the region. Additionally, I engaged three local guides to visit and learn about the sites of three (now bankrupt) former Soviet factories. I have also annotated and analysed a number of Ukrainian language investigative journalism reports and television programmes dealing with the local economy.

Post-socialist dispossessions: On wages, jobs and managerial authority

As the Soviet system unravelled from the contradictions of the 'marketless market' (Filtzer, 1991), that which earlier made Lviv an important industrial centre now made it vulnerable. Without the Soviet economy, its technologically underdeveloped manufacturing and uncompetitive output could not easily be re-oriented to foreign markets (as could mining and metallurgy in Eastern Ukraine), causing a liquidity crisis, the non-payment of wages and local economic collapse. Struggles for enterprise control by former managers in alliance with local criminal organisations in league with local politicians, asset stripping of state enterprises, lawlessness and political unpredictability made Lviv unattractive to foreign investors.

Low wages were the central problem with which interviewees engaged. While official wage data has been challenged by claims that shadow earnings (the so-called 'envelope wages') allow workers to take home higher pay, public opinion and ethnographic research

have shown that the low minimum wage constitutes the key problem of wealth distribution (Williams, Round, & Rodgers, 2011) and reflects government failure to implement social policy and labour market reforms. The collapse of the Soviet model of the citizen-worker resulted in the decline in social support for families, drop in the real value of social benefits, rising costs of childcare, absence of work–family life policies, reversal of trends that secured benefits for women workers. For the vast majority of Ukrainians, wages are the main means of providing security, meanwhile the collapse of paternalistic trade unions that were part of the Soviet apparatus of labour control left workers incapable to defend jobs and wages collectively.

We just didn't know what to do, whom to talk to, where to seek help. ...Some people agitated to go to city administration. But, what was the use? Nobody, neither the city council nor the police would do anything; they all worked hand-in-hand with the owners. Other people said, "let's establish workers' control", but most of us just laughed. What did they want – to go back to the USSR [laughs]? (Jurij)

The acute problems of wage delays and non-payment in the early years of transition were hampered by the stigma of the official Soviet working-class identity. The interviewees still displayed a sense of despondence at the cynicism with which privatisation was carried out (often by yesterday's Party members).

We were the first to support privatisation. We wanted a normal market economy. We supported [privatisation] activists, even our managers [that agitated for privatisation]. But, as soon as [these managers] took charge, that was it – we were no longer needed. I felt betrayed; many of us did. Worse, they were useless. We had an excellent enterprise; one of the best. Our machinery could have saved our farmers. Instead, the factory was destroyed. And our agriculture too. We started making shovels and hand implements, portable weed sprayers. Then we couldn't even sell these, because the Chinese imports were cheaper and better. No output, no wages. And no jobs elsewhere. (Olha)

Quarter century of capitalism in L'viv have brought economic changes, but these have resulted more from spontaneous adjustments to international and technological conditions of the market than systematic application of government reforms. There has been a wholesale shift to service jobs. Interviewees who worked as technicians, skilled manual

workers or office employees in large engineering firms have spent the last 20-25 years working in stores and markets, administrative jobs in transportation, wholesale and retail organisations, while their work has involved few specialist skills, making their jobs easily replaceable by technology, reorganisation, or younger workers willing to work for lower wages. Second, there are very few opportunities for career growth or social mobility, given the existing employment structures, and as they get older, interviewees expressed fears and frustration that they might not stay in work until retirement. One male worker explained in despair:

I have spent the last 20 years going from job to job. I started at [the factory] on the conveyor line, coming straight from college, from the village. Got an apartment. We felt fortunate [*shchaslyvi*] to have jobs like that. Within 5 years there were only a third of us left, working half days. I left with a few friends to set up a car service business. That didn't work. Since then I've worked as a lorry driver, a public minibus (*marshrutka*) driver, and now shuttling people in a minibus to Poland. At [the factory] I could have progressed in my career; I had higher technical education and they offered training. Like this, what can I expect? (Mykola)

The paradox expressed through the narratives was of individuals in leading positions failing, as a result of their ignorance, deviance, or corruptibility, to carry through market reforms that would otherwise bring about fairness and plenty. The sentiment, expressed at various instances and in different ways through the interviews, was that managers were greedy, wicked or ignorant, while workers were victims or dupes. The problems workers faced were understood as ones of managers' morality and character, rather than results of demands and pressures of the market economy, and the place that Ukraine occupies within it.

They [bosses] have never done an honest thing. First, they were in the Party. Then they joined with some local bandits. Now they say they're 'businessmen'. What kind of businessmen are they, if the only thing they know how to do is cheat and scheme? Had it not been for the corrupt authorities (*vlada*) which runs our country, and even our city, these people would be in prison. Then I see some of them on TV or on the Internet talking to some European businessmen, EU officials. What do they have in common with these people? Nothing. (Natalia)

Curiously, interviewees seldom gave up hope of finding a fairer market economy, only these days they sought it via EU membership. On the one hand, the individualisation and moralisation of owners was used to explain the failures of local product markets to deliver higher wages and better job prospects. This was reminiscent of nationalist political parties promising local workers 'genuine capitalism' by 'sweeping away' corrupt oligarchs. But it also reflected a political culture developed in post-Soviet Ukraine, that solutions to economic problems will come in the form of better (sometimes foreign) rulers, disregarding the inherent problem with markets.

Skill, gender and the morality of class

The market economy forced many workers to transition to dead-end service jobs, insecure employment in the newly created small and medium enterprises, or to employment below their skill level in foreign-owned companies. Those who managed to retain skill-appropriate jobs in white-collar office work (predominantly women), found their pay to be meagre and treated their jobs as insurance against potential job losses of their spouses or family members. Highly qualified male technicians, engineers and specialists were forced to seek work as market sellers, shuttlers, drivers or car mechanics in private garages. Women tended to be more mobile, migrating illegally to Western Europe, where they often worked on the margins of the formal economy and sent remittances which prevented the local economy from sinking.

The problem of migration in relation to narrowing economic opportunities occupied a prominent place in interviews. The proportion of migrants from the Lviv area has always been higher than from the central and eastern parts of Ukraine, which explains the heightened awareness of it, as well as related legal and practical knowledge. The gendered aspect of migration stood out especially clearly – often expressed in interviews as practical anxieties about friends and neighbours, narratives hid a neatly constructed moral play about the role of men and women, mothers and children, the family as the bedrock of the nation, and the idea of being a dignified person (*hidna liudyna*). Neighbours or friends who took part in circular migration were seen as more, rather than less, disadvantaged, despite having more disposable income and furnishing their families with higher consumption. Given that in the

preceding decade much of the migration for seasonal farm work in Poland, and domestic or care work in Italy, Portugal and Spain had been done by women (Fedyuk & Kindler, 2016; Górný, 2017; Hosnedlova & Stanek, 2014; Leifsen & Tymczuk, 2012), this broke with the dominant understanding of 'proper' familial and gender relations. The moral appraisal among workers, of women who left by women who remained, seemed important for the workers to maintain a sense of worth in their own eyes and that of their 'appraisers', an expression of 'lay normativity' (Sayer, 2005) necessary in the respondents' eyes to stave off what could be called 'crisis in proprietorial authority' (Skeggs, 2005).

It was notable that the respondents clearly disassociated from what could be called a 'Soviet' attitude towards migration, specifically women migrants. Whereas certain public figures (especially before the 2014 Maidan revolution) posited Ukrainian women migrants as 'prostitutes' or 'defectors' (Solari, 2014), my respondents were keen to defend the dignity of the migrant workers – portraying their actions as necessary, desperation-driven or courageous. In this – whether seen as compassion, solidarity, or instrumentally defending themselves against similar attacks – they keenly discerned that much of the work all workers have had to undertake could be cast as 'dirty', not associated with everything 'progressive' or 'advanced', and 'beneath' their dignity. Such anti-imagery seemed both to reject the Soviet narrative of betrayal and failure to toil for the benefit of the motherland, and to deflect the fashionable neoliberal narratives of the tech-savvy, creative and youthful worker that Ukraine needs. Narratives that used religious terminologies and imagery characterising women as saints, victims or saviours seemed stronger.

One issue in particular that elicited both pity and reproach among the interviewees was the long absences of young mothers abroad while grandmothers (usually in their 40s or early 50s) tended to the children. Men, when mentioned in the same context, were seen as 'providers', making the sacrifices expected of them in tough times. When probed deeper, a male interviewee responded:

My neighbour goes to Poland as farm hand every summer. Several years now. They pick strawberries, raspberries, vegetables from hothouses. From farm to farm, for two months. They work hard, until sundown. Sure, he comes back from Poland with enough money to rest for months and everyone is happy. But what kind of work is it for a man? Especially a skilled mechanic, a city man (*mistianyn*), not some peasant (*Mykola*).

Echoing discourses of survival, work ethic and responsibility, projecting a desire to maintain the world in 'moral order' (Lamont, 2000, pp. 17-35), it also evokes a gender order closely linked to different jobs for, and value of skills of, women and men.

Some participants, however, spoke about migration in morally-neutral terms, especially in view of the recent developments in neighbouring countries' labour markets that have stemmed the chaotic forms of mobility of the previous two decades. The introduction of a simplified work visa regime for Ukrainians in Poland and Czechia, and the opening up of formal employment in manufacturing and consumer services jobs in those countries, is seemingly nudging respondents not invoke gender or skill moralisation. Interestingly, the respondents' pragmatic attitude towards labour migration stands in contrast to the perceptible anxiety in much of the Ukrainian media and think-tanks, which are often used as political fodder to discredit the country's politicians for permitting Ukraine to be 'drained' of precious resources and for failing to provide opportunities for self-realisation 'at home'.

The improvement in the local economy, following the signing of the Association Agreement with the EU¹, and especially the implementation of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), have not fully solved Ukraine's key problem of having the lowest average wages in Europe. Despite the idea that binding FTAs to labour standards will improve labour rights or support trade union institutions (Harrison, Barbu, Campling, Richardson, & Smith, 2018), Ukraine's institutionally weak trade unions and non-competitive product markets give little hope of improvement to local workers. Paradoxically, the low wages that ostensibly make Lviv attractive for FDI are offset by its proximity to the EU border (and workers willing to migrate to Poland or Czechia, where wage growth has been significant), tilting company decisions towards expanding production in those countries rather than risk investing in Ukraine.

Workers between nation and empire

Ukrainian workers have been left with a conflicted sense of class – a stigma around collective interests has been matched by society's rejection of workers as bearers of the vestiges of socialism. The growth of inequality and poverty has produced individualisation and

¹ [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:22014A0529\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:22014A0529(01))

adaptation, forcing workers to retreat from self-identifying as 'working class' to deflect feelings associated with being poor, uneducated and 'losers'. Yet, while the Soviet-defined working-class identity has been delegitimised, other institutions and practices have become prominent as markers of workers' identity, based on specific historical experiences. Indeed, if we accept the view that identities are effects that more or less adequately equip individuals and groups to assert their 'values beyond market value' (Skeggs, 2014), we can start to see the three axes along which local workers' subjectivities are constituted, namely as Greek Catholics, as Galician Ukrainians, and as sufferers of post-colonial trauma (Riabczuk, 2015).

The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) has long played a central role in the formation of Galician and Ukrainian identity, founding or being associated with many educational, cultural and social institutions, playing a defining role in the region's formation as the 'Piedmont of Ukraine'. While repression against the Church started in 1939 with the Soviet invasion of eastern Poland and continued after the Soviets entered L'viv in 1944, it was not until 1946 that UGCC was eliminated by the KGB through a fraudulent 'Church Council' folding the organisation into the Russian Orthodox Church. Subsequently, while a small number of priests managed to conduct services clandestinely, those clerics who were found out were subject to physical or moral coercion, many were apprehended by the KGB, tried and convicted in secret courts as 'enemies of people', sent to Siberia or disappeared in mysterious circumstances, while lay members were systematically discriminated against.

In 1989 the Church was revived as part of Perestroika and began to establish itself in the Western regions of Ukraine. It was seen as the only authentic institution in the late-Soviet period, a martyr organisation that formed a genuine link with the people and held widespread legitimacy. But it was mainly its activity among the people, and specifically its social mission among the rising numbers of the poor and needy, that was notable. UGCC was very active in recovering Church buildings and consecrating new ones, opening centres for children, families, the elderly and the ill, raising awareness of poverty and social needs that touched a growing number of people in the region, and engaging the young generation. It was also the key institution consistently standing against corruption and lawlessness that were destroying Ukraine's society, delivering a message focused on responsibility, doing good in the community and leaving a worthy legacy.

The Church was also involved in a number of cases where its priests intervened in industrial or property disputes, including in the non-payment of wages, with priests personally making various appeals to owners and managers.

I remember we had a long-running dispute with management in the early-2000s about a sudden non-payment of wages. Everything had been ok for a number of years, we had some orders, even though about two-thirds of the company was no longer working. Many of us were angry then. One Sunday after church service we were discussing this. We asked our priest to give us advice. At first he was trying to explain that we need to make peace with [the owners], that they are sinners and that praying for them hopefully will bring change. Then he started to hear our desperation and decided that he should speak to the Director himself. I heard of other priests doing that in Žovkva [a town outside L'viv] but I didn't believe it until now. Well, a good number of us from the factory are parishioners, and we had an honest negotiator on our side. Many members of the collective joined us, maybe even because it was Father B who was leading this. I don't know. But, soon after that [management] called a meeting to tell us they will be paying our back wages, slowly and over the next eight months, but, nonetheless, all will be sorted. (Roman)

For the interviewees being Greek Catholic had become synonymous with being honest and righteous, but also modern and European. It was also a sign of being a 'true' Ukrainian. None of them denied the identity of other Ukrainians as less Ukrainian, but most felt that they have made a quasi-religious 'purification' journey. That is, that they have rid themselves of those elements that made Ukrainians susceptible to doubt about their identity in terms of its relation to Soviet or Russian identity. This helped to explain why discussions of wages, managerial authority and career opportunities, their views on jobs, skills, labour markets and the capitalist economy, were linked to problems of Ukraine's position in the world, its unsettled relationship with Russia and the European Union, and the moral significance of choosing to remain in or migrate from L'viv.

To understand this, the narratives repeatedly brought up the role played in this order of things by Ukraine's relationships with its historical metropolias, be they Austrian, Polish or Russian. By passing moral judgments and individualising the transgressions of businessmen the workers were not naïve, but rather recognised the role that foreign powers had played in Ukraine's colonisation. The way interviewees spoke about Ukraine's historical struggles for national self-determination partly reflects how colonial powers governed territories: that being Ukrainian had been equivalent to being workers, while those Ukrainians who had

enjoyed elite positions were collaborators who had exchanged their national loyalty for riches. In a situation of historical statelessness, the struggle for 'national liberation' can enjoy equivalence with that of the 'liberation of labour' from a 'foreign power'. The interviewees' centralisation of 'nationhood', therefore, forced a shifting of the research lens away from the nation as a unit of analysis, towards seeing it as a modality of workers' lives and struggles. In other words, 'nationhood' in a post-colonial constellation must be treated as one of a number of variables affecting the experience of class.

Conclusion: Social forms, mediation and labour subjectivity

The narratives and experiences of workers in L'viv highlight the limitations of conceptualising working-class identity without considering the subjectivities of working-class lives as constituted through their local and historical social determinations. They enable us to capture the multidimensionality of the subjects of labour who, on the one hand, assume the role of a class by virtue of their relation to the means of production, and, on the other hand, (do or do not) self-identify with 'class' as a social category.

As Hall argues with regards to race, it is 'the modality in which class is lived' and 'the medium in which class relations are experienced', as is the case with all social relations that simultaneously mediate class (Hall, et al., 1978, p. 394 in Anthias, 1990). The contingent character of these determinations – here via religious convictions, national belonging and post-colonial traumas – presents a challenge of theorising a generic worker or essential worker, or uniform forms of 'consciousness'. The important task is to find the commonalities that unite forms of being through social forms in which they subsist, and attend to their specificity.

Because we do not 'always already know what identity and difference mean in their configurations with history, capital and class' (Bannerji, 1995, p. 19), the case study elaborates the long-established axiom that society is made up of considerably more than class relations and is a 'rich totality of many determinations and relations' (Marx, 1993, p. 100). The mediation of class by other social relations and through other social forms means that it does not exist outside of them or can be constituted in isolation and mechanically brought into contact with them. Labour subjectivity is shaped by these influences, and all

labouring subjects are affected by how social relations other than those of class are ordered. Indeed, 'class-consciousness [is] always the last, not the first, stage in the real historical process' (Thompson, 1978, p. 149). Privileging the causal role of class in social processes does not produce a more authentic analysis than studying, for example, gender relations. Likewise, it would be wrong to suggest that the identities and relations of Lviv workers vis-à-vis their religious convictions, national belonging or post-colonial traumas invalidate their working-class status.

The study shows that workers' subjectivity arises from the intersection of various determinations (Thompson, 1978). Examining the mediations allows us to grasp the 'unity of the diverse' where no social relation is not already 'internally related' to other social relations, and therefore each is constituted in and through these relations (Bannerji, 1995; McNally, 2015). The internal relationships between social forms and relations 'co-constituted' as always-already moments of a multi-dimensional social existence (Collins, 1998; Crenshaw, 1989), where the relationship between class as a material mode of existence of labour, and its religious or national social forms represents a trace of a concrete historical formation of the subjectivity of labour.

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